DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 419 210 CG 028 476

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TITLE A Comparison of Character Values as Perceived by Teachers and Students at Differing Grade Levels.
PUB DATE 1998-04-00
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Diego, CA, April 13-17, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Attitude Measures; Comparative Analysis; Elementary Secondary Education; Moral Development; *Student Attitudes; *Student Development; *Teacher Attitudes; *Values Clarification; Values Education

ABSTRACT

In response to the belief that the number one problem facing students today is their character and value system, school officials in Georgia's Carrollton City Schools District wished to implement a character education program. They were concerned, however, whether the program would be appropriate for all grade levels, and so they developed an instrument that measures the presence or absence of behaviors associated with 16 character values. Faculty at all grade levels within the school system, as well as students, were involved in the formation of the instrument, which examines behavior associated with the 16 character values. Based on the data collected, a definite need for a character education curriculum was evident. The greatest need was shown to be at the junior high and high school levels particularly in the areas of respect, courtesy, forgiveness, and humility. At the elementary level the greatest needs were for courtesy, generosity, and sportsmanship. This instrument should not only help to determine which character values schools need to target, it can also help to determine if their efforts have resulted in improved behaviors associated with the targeted character values. Appendices include a copy of the instrument and graphic representations of its implementation. (MKA)

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ED 419 210

COMPARISON OF CHARACTER VALUES

A COMPARISON OF CHARACTER VALUES AS PERCEIVED BY TEACHERS AND STUDENTS AT DIFFERING GRADE LEVELS

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A roundtable presentation at the American Educational Research Association Conference in San Diego, CA on 4-17-1998

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Definition:

Character value has been called a trait or a virtue as it is used in this paper. Lickona (1989), who has been a pioneer in this field, explained that character consists of operative values. As those values develop, they become virtues, that is behaviors consistent with their values. According to Burrett & Rusnak, 1993, character describes a person's organized set of beliefs and values that influence actions related to ethical decisions. Values are general ideals individuals hold that determine their choice of action.

Bulach (1998) combined the two terms "character" and "value" and defined them as follows: "an intrinsic attitude or belief that determines a person's behavior in relation to other people and in relation to self. A character value such as sportsmanship, generosity, courtesy, and empathy would have behavior associated with that character value which would be easily observable in relation to other people. A character value such as diligence, motivation, self respect, and self control would have behavior associated with that character value which would relate more to self and not be so easily observable" (p.5).

Theoretical Perspective

Identifying the behaviors associated with each character value and a method for measuring the extent to which those behaviors are present or absent was necessary. The presence or absence of the behaviors associated with each character value could vary at different grade levels. This data would help determine what curriculum should be developed for differing grade levels; and would serve as baseline data to measure any improvement in behaviors associated with that character value as a result of the curriculum implementation.

Methodology

Research in the character education area is complicated by the absence of a definition (Lockwood, 1997; Leming, 1997). No common perspective exists to provide a basis for a coherent research projects. Nevertheless, schools that are implementing programs have a desire to know where their work should focus and if there is evidence of success.

There are two approaches to the evaluation of character education in the 1990's. The first is largely qualitative, based upon anecdotal evidence or surveys of teachers and administrators. They do not control for bias. The second approach uses an experimental design, focuses upon student behavior, compares control and experimental groups and attempts to control for bias (Leming, 1993). This research is similar to the first approach as it collects data from students and teachers regarding their perceptions of the presence or absence of behaviors associated with character values.

The Carrollton Public Schools community is approximately 50 miles from Atlanta. It is a city school district consisting of one high school, a junior high school and an elementary

school with 3600 students and 250 certified staff. The student body has a minority population of 41% per cent. In previous research in this community, Bulach (1998) had consensus from ministers, teachers, and parents at all grade levels on the 16 character values that had been identified as relevant for the Carrollton school community. They are the following: 1) respect for self, others and property, 2) honesty, 3) self control/discipline, 4) responsibility/dependability/accountability, 5) cooperation, 6) integrity/fairness, 7) kindness, 8) perseverance/diligence/motivation, 9) compassion/empathy, 10) courtesy/politeness, 11) forgiveness, 12) patriotism/ citizenship, 13) tolerance of diversity, 14) humility, 15) generosity/charity, and 16) sportsmanship.

School officials believed that the present state of student behavior (baseline data) on these 16 character values had to be measured in order to determine if the character education curriculum (to be developed) had any effect. Consequently, an instrument to measure the extent to which these character values were present in each of the schools was necessary. It was believed that each character value would have certain behaviors associated with it. For example, if the character value honesty were present in a student, there should be certain behaviors present. That is to say, the student would not steal, would not lie, would turn in items found, would not cheat, etc. In order to construct this instrument, all faculty at all grade levels were involved in generating a list of behaviors they thought would be typical of each of the 16 character values.

Faculty were instructed to write three to four behaviors that they might see if a student modeled that character value. They were to do this for all 16 character values. Some faculty generated more than four and some faculty didn't write any. Based on their input, behaviors which were typical of each of the 16 character values were identified and agreed upon. The number of behaviors for each character value averaged six, with the maximum number of behaviors being nine for respect and the minimum being four for forgiveness. The final instrument consisted of 99 behaviors (see Appendix A for the behaviors identified with each character value).

Students and teachers responded to each of the items on a five point Likert scale ranging from "never" to "always." A Cronbach alpha was used to measure the internal consistency/reliability of the instrument. The reliability coefficient involving 222 high school students was .96, for 210 junior highs school students it was also .96 and for 30 third grade students it was .97. Data were collected from teachers at all grade levels regarding their perception of whether the behaviors typical of these character values were present. Data were also collected from students at grades three, four, seven, and ten regarding their perceptions of whether these behaviors were practiced by their peers.

The instrument has construct validity only for those behaviors that measure a character value. It is possible that there are other behaviors associated with a character value that were not measured. Consequently, a student could be honest on the six behaviors that measure honesty and not be honest on some other behavior not measured by the instrument. A further constraint on validity, is that students report only on what they think other students do or think. Their perception could be inaccurate.

The number of faculty and students involved varied from building to building. One criteria for collecting data was that it would only be collected from students who would be present at least two years. It was necessary to collect repeated measures of the data in order to determine the effect of the character curriculum. Consequently, data were collected from tenth grade students at the high school (224 students and 35 faculty); from seventh grade students at the junior high (210 students and 37 faculty); and from 30 randomly selected third grade students; and 30 randomly selected fourth grade students at the elementary school. Baseline data from seventy-one elementary faculty was also collected. As an afterthought, baseline data was also collected on 30 disruptive students in order to determine if students who are disruptive have different character values than students who are not disruptive. It was also believed that it may be harder to change the character values of disruptive students than students who were not disruptive. Consequently, baseline data on this target population was needed.

The faculty baseline data is graphically represented in Appendix B. The overall or average score for all 16 character values is 2.92 for the faculty at the junior high and high school and 3.26 for the faculty at the elementary school. At no time did the faculty at the three schools agree that any of the character values were present "a lot" or a score of 4.0. The elementary faculty came close to agreeing on "patriotism" and "respect" with scores of 3.7 and 3.6. The highest scores for the high school were on "kindness," "cooperation," and "integrity" with scores of 3.2, 3.1, and 3.1. The highest scores for the junior faculty were also on "kindness," and "cooperation" with scores of 3.1 and 3.1. The highest score was on "self-control" with a score of 3.2 compared to 3.0 for the high school faculty.

The lowest scores for high school and junior high school faculty indicate that the behaviors for some character values are exhibited "a little" or a score of 2.0. High school faculty have the lowest scores on "forgiveness," "humility," "courtesy," and "respect" with scores of 2.6, 2.5, 2.6, and 2.5. Junior high faculty have their lowest scores on "sportsmanship" with a score of 2.6. All other scores are 2.7 or higher. The elementary faculty also agreed that "sportsmanship is the character value least in evidence with a score of 2.8 with all other scores being 3.0 or higher.

Student baseline data is graphically represented in (Appendix C). The overall or average score for all 16 character values is 2.75 for the students at the high school, 2.86 for the students at the junior high and 3.53 for the students at the elementary school. The students at the elementary school are much more positive about the presence of behaviors that are typical of each character value than the students at the junior high and high school. They even agree that the behaviors for honesty and respect are seen "a lot" with scores of 4.1 and 4.1.

High school students had a noticeably different perception of the presence of behaviors representing the character values being measured with an overall score of 2.77 compared to the faculty score of 2.92. They scored lower on almost every character value than the faculty, with the exception of sportsmanship. Students viewed themselves as exhibiting more sportsmanship than the faculty with a score of 2.8 compared to faculty with a score of 2.7. In no instance did students have a score of 3.0 on any character value. They did agree with the faculty (Appendix D) that the character values least in evidence were:

"forgiveness," "humility," "courtesy," and "respect" with scores of 2.6, 2.5, 2.6, and 2.5. The fact that both faculty and students had identical scores on these four character values adds credence to the validity and reliability of the instrument for measuring the extent to which character values are present.

Junior high students also had lower scores than the faculty on most of the character values (Appendix E) with scores of 2.86 compared to a faculty score of 2.91. For example, students apparently see less "forgiveness," "kindness," "cooperation," and "self-control" than faculty. Exceptions, where they had higher scores were on "perseverance," "integrity," "sportsmanship," and "honesty". While there is a difference in their perceptions, it appears to be a small difference with the largest variation in scores being only 0.2 on a 5 point scale.

While the junior high and high school students have lower scores on character values than the faculty, the opposite is true of elementary school students. The overall score for fourth grade students was 3.52; and for third grade students 3.46 (Appendix F) compared to teachers with a score of 3.27 (Appendix G). Nevertheless, there is agreement on the character values least in evidence. Students and faculty agree that "sportsmanship" and "perseverance" are the character values least in evidence.

The data from disruptive students (Appendix H) provide some interesting comparisons. For example, they viewed their peers as having higher scores on the following behaviors than either nondisruptive students or faculty: "forgiveness," "kindness," "integrity," and "responsibility." Apparently they have a more positive image of their peers on these character traits than faculty or nondisruptive students. Conversely, they view their peers much more negatively on "respect," "honesty," "perseverance," "humility," and "courtesy." Further research needs to be completed to explain why these differences exist. Overall the disruptive students are less positive about their peers with a score of 3.4 than are nondisruptive students with a score of 3.53.

The Difference in Character Traits Between Grade Levels.

Both faculty and students at the elementary school believe students at that level exhibit more of the behaviors associated with the 16 character values than at other levels (see Appendices B and C). Another difference is that elementary students see "honesty" and "respect" as being present "a lot" while junior high and high school students only believe these behaviors are present "sometimes." One other difference was that elementary faculty only scored students a 3.3 on "honesty" compared to students score of 4.1. This is the widest disparity between student and faculty scores for any of the character values.

When teacher and student scores are combined at the high school, only "kindness," "responsibility," and "self-control" have scores of 6.0 or better. At the junior high school, only "kindness," "cooperation," "self control," "honesty," and "self respect" have scores of 6.0 or higher. However, the differences are so small as to make any differences insignificant. The lowest scores for both schools are on the character values "forgiveness," "humility," "courtesy," and "respect." Consequently, the presence or lack of character values at these two schools can be viewed as virtually the same.

The differences that exist between the elementary school students and the students at the junior high and high school could be attributed to several factors. It is possible that as students grow older, they exhibit fewer of the behaviors attributed to each of the character values. That could occur as a result of peer pressure or maturity. However, there is a good possibility that the character education program that was implemented at the start of the school year at the elementary school has had an impact on the behaviors associated with these character values. Since baseline data was not collected in the fall, it can not be determined whether the difference is associated with age, maturity, or the character education program.

The next step is to develop a curriculum to improve targeted character values. It is suggested that the curriculum be written to address the behaviors associated with each character value. An improvement in behavior is more likely to occur if the character education curriculum is aligned with the behaviors measured by instrument. For example, if there is a need to improve behavior associated with honesty, the curriculum must address lying, stealing, cheating, and other behaviors associated with honesty. According to Wagner (1996), "Values are caught more than they are taught" (p. 149). If this is true, then it follows that the focus must be on the behaviors associated with each character value, because these can be seen and modeled and caught.

Based on the data, there are a large number of youngsters and children who are exhibiting good character values. If it is true that character values are caught and not taught, then these students who are exhibiting good character values become very important. If the right atmosphere is created in a school, these students could serve as role models for character values, and they might have more of an impact than they are currently having.

Other Use of the Instrumentation

The instrument yields a score for each of the character values and an average score for all character values. This allows school officials to identify those character values that are most in need of improvement. A curriculum can be developed to target individual character values and a repeated measure can be used to determine whether their efforts have resulted in any improvement. It is suggested that no more than eight or nine character values be addressed each year. The curriculum should be infused throughout the school day by all the teachers and not be made the responsibility of a subject area teacher such as social studies.

Further analysis of the data generated by the instrument shows fairly strong relationships between the character values. Correlational data ranged from a low of +.31 for "self control" and "generosity" to a high of +.82 for "tolerance" and "kindness." Since all of the character values are related, an improvement in one should result in improvements in the others as well. Further research is necessary to find out if this theory is correct.

Conclusions

An instrument has been developed that measures the presence or absence of behaviors associated with 16 character values. Based on the data there is a definite need for a character education curriculum with the greatest need at the junior high and high school being for the character values "respect," "courtesy," "forgiveness," and "humility." At the elementary level the greatest need was for "courtesy," "generosity," and "sportsmanship." Using the above process, school officials can determine which character values to target. They can also determine, based on scores generated by the instrument, whether their efforts have resulted in any improvement in behaviors associated with targeted character values.

Further Study

The effectiveness of different curriculums to improve the behaviors associated with each character value or trait need further study. As the behaviors associated with character values improve, there should be changes in other factors such as achievement, absenteeism, office referrals, and school climate.

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SELECTED CHARACTER VALUES AND THEIR CORRESPONDING BEHAVIORS

Respect for self/others/property

Score

5. Students think about the feelings of other students.
6 Students are destructive of school or other property.
7. Students are positive about themselves.
14. Students act to improve the appearance of the school or other property.
15. Students do things that hurt other students.
95. Students act as if sexual activity is okay.
96. Students use tobacco.
97. Students use drugs and/or alcohol.
16. Students do things that are destructive for themselves.

Honesty

Score

11. Students tell the truth.
12. Students cheat.
13. Students steal.
8. Students think it is okay to do something as long as they don't get caught.
9. Students take things that don't belong to them.
10. Students turn in money or things that have been lost if they find them.

Self-control/discipline

Score

17. Students control themselves/behave when they need to.
18. Students do what the teachers ask them to do.
19. Students resist those things that are not good for them or that will get them in trouble.
20. Students are able to wait to get what they want.
24. Students pay attention in class.
25. Students are easily swayed by their peers.
26. Students control their anger.

Responsibility/dependability/accountability

Score

27. Students complete their classwork on time.
28. Students turn in their homework on time.
29. Students accept the consequences of their decisions/actions.
21. Students can be trusted to do what they say they will do.
22. Students make excuses for their actions/argue about the consequences.
23. Students do what the teacher asks without having to be reminded.

Integrity/fairness

Score

30. Students take the side of the most popular student.
31. Students do what they are supposed to do.
32. Students allow other to lead them into doing something that is wrong.
39. Students take advantage of other students if given a chance.
40. Students treat others the way they would want to be treated.
41. Students stand up or speak out for what they believe is right.

Perseverance/diligence

Score

36. Students finish an assignment within the allotted time.
37. Students are distracted when doing their work.
38. Students daydream, doodle, stare out the window.
33. Students show determination when faced with a problem.
34. Students think about and plan their work.
35. Students give up when they fail or are faced with adversity.

Cooperation

Score

42. Students help each other.
43. Students help the teacher.
48. Students work well in groups.
49. Students argue with each other.
50. Students compromise to solve a conflict/problem.
44. Students fight with each other.

Compassion/empathy

Score

51. Students help a student who is being picked on.
52. Students listen to each other's problems.
53. Students comfort/console other students who have a problem.
45. Students show sympathy for other students who are having a problem.
46. Students pick on each other.
47. Students say/do things that hurt other students.

Kindness

Score

54. Students are nice to each other.
55. Students are nice to teachers and other adults.
56. Students say things about others that are harmful.
61. Students give compliments to each other.
62. Students are cruel to each other.
63. Students help students who have physical or mental disabilities.

Forgiveness

Score

59. Students hold grudges.
60. Students accept an apology to end a problem.
57. Students try to get even.
58. Students accept the mistakes of others.

Patriotism/citizenship

Score

64. Students are positive about their country.
65. Students are positive about the police.
66. Students are positive about the need for rules and laws.
72. Students care about their community.
73. Students care about their school.
74. Students volunteer their services to help where needed.

Tolerance/diversity

Score

69. Students make fun of students who are different.
70. Students accept students who are from a different race or religion.
67. Students make fun of ideas that are different from theirs.
68. Students accept differences of opinion.
71. Students make an effort to understand students who are different.

Courtesy/politeness

Score

77. Students interrupt when others are talking.
78. Students use cuss words or bad language.
82. Students say things like: thank you, pardon me, etc. when appropriate.
83. Students listen when someone is talking to them.
84. Students ignore other students.
79. Students call each other names.
98. Students talk back to teachers and other adults.

Generosity/charity

Score

80. Students are willing to share what they have with others.
81. Students want to know what is in it for them.
75. Students are more concerned about themselves than they are of others.
76. Students want to help the less fortunate.

Sportsmanship

Score

87. Students get mad when they lose.
88. Students congratulate their opponents whether they win or lose.
89. Students quit trying if they know they are going to lose.
93. Students will cheat to win.
94. Students agree that "how the game is played" is more important than winning.

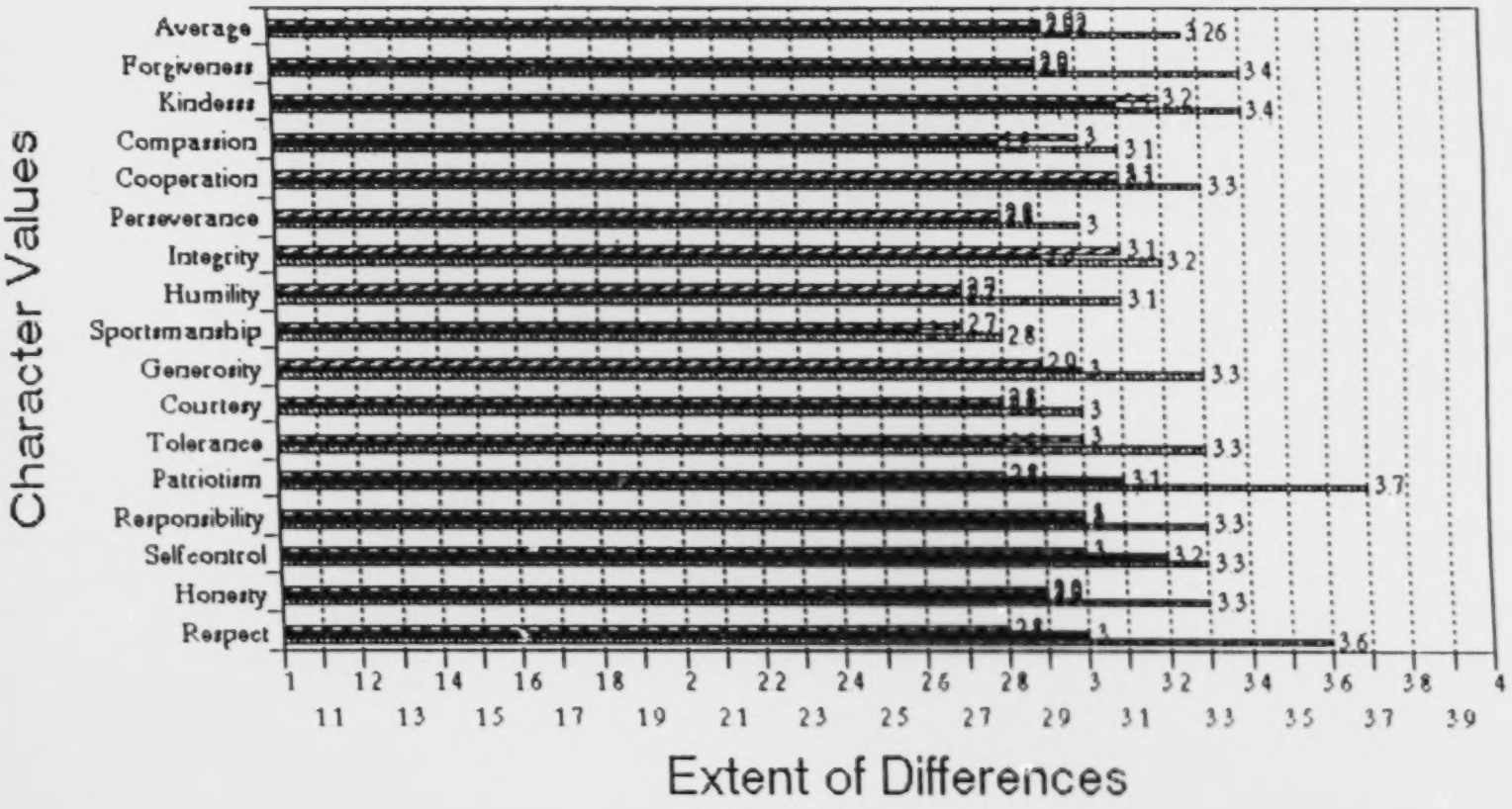
Humility

Score

85. Students care too much about their appearance, e.g., having the right clothing, looking just right, etc. .
86. Students brag about themselves.
90. Students want to be the center of attention.
91. Students talk down to other students.
92. Students act as if they are better than other students.
99. Students admit when they are wrong.

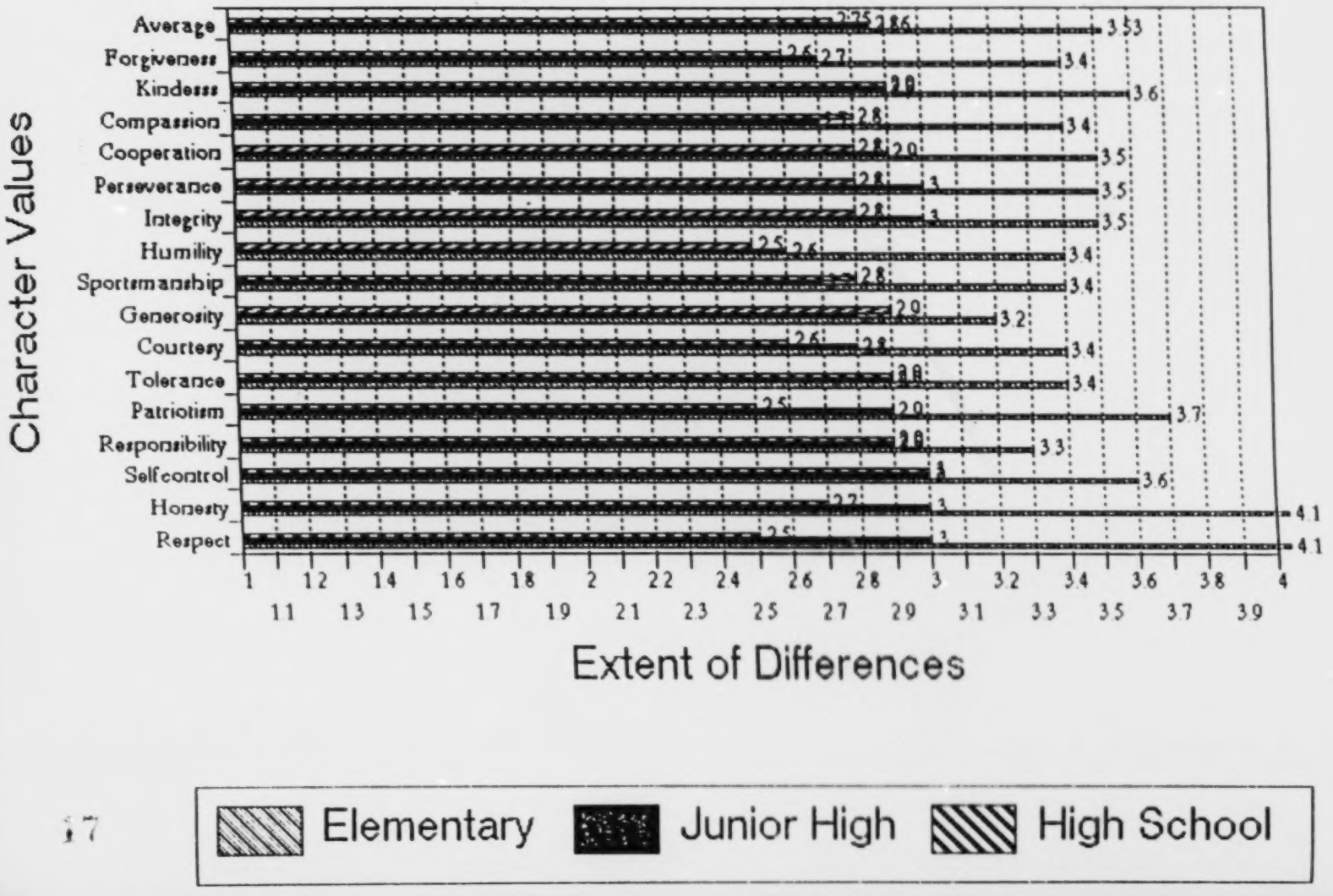
CARROLLTON CITY SCHOOLS

CHARACTER COMPARISONS (teachers)



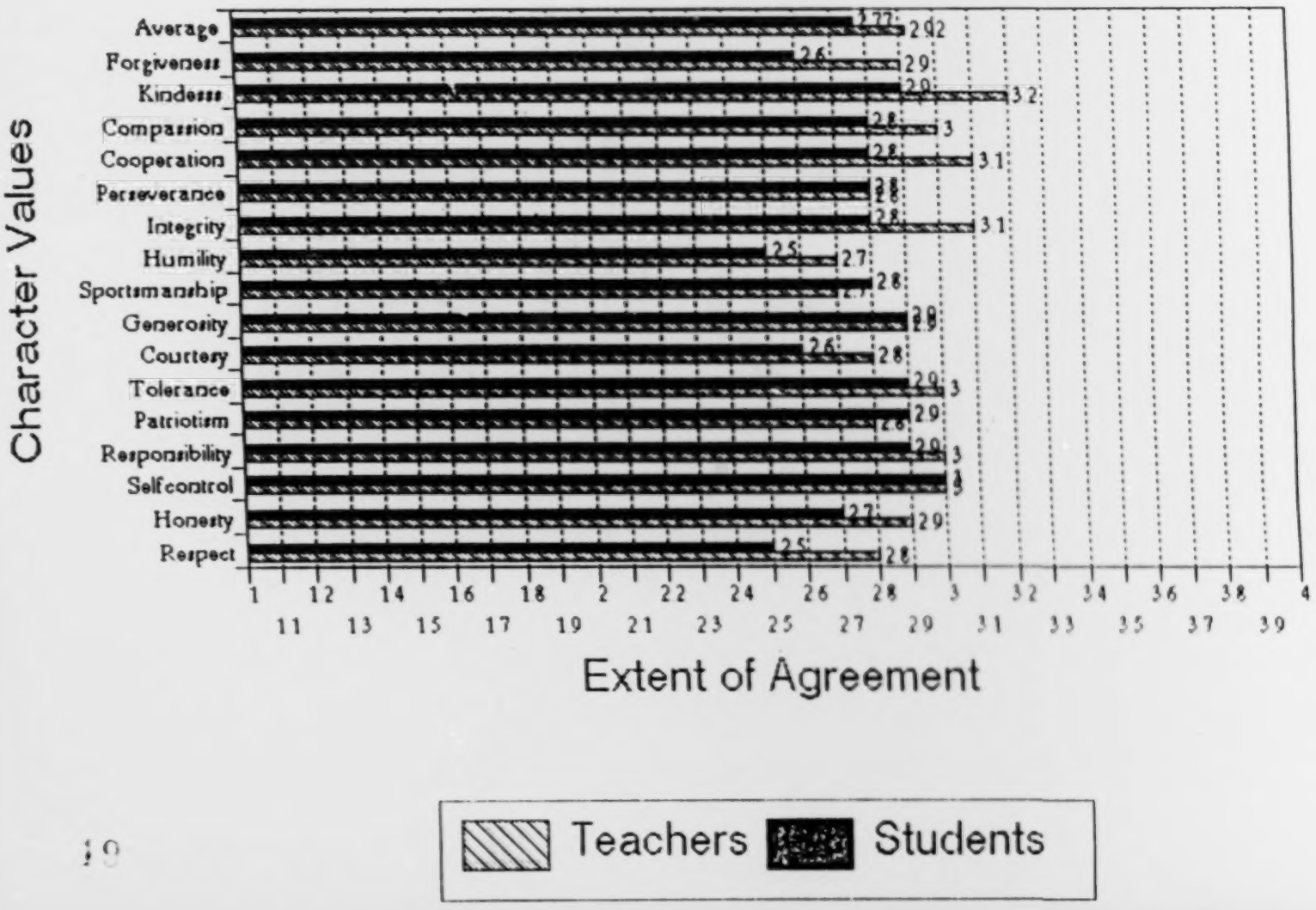
CARROLLTON CITY SCHOOLS

CHARACTER COMPARISONS (students)



CARROLLTON HIGH SCHOOL

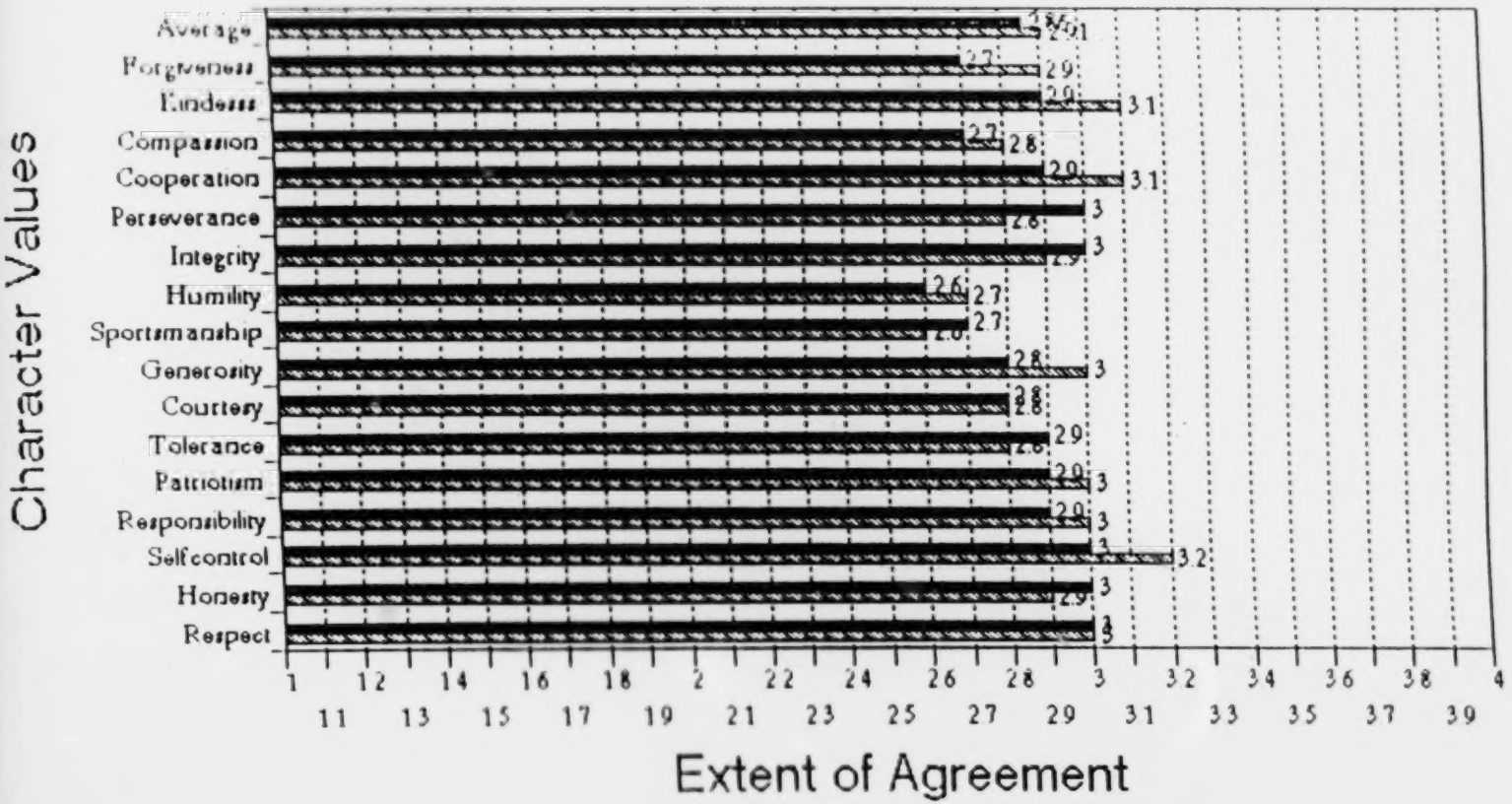
Teachers' and Students' Perceptions



APPENDIX E

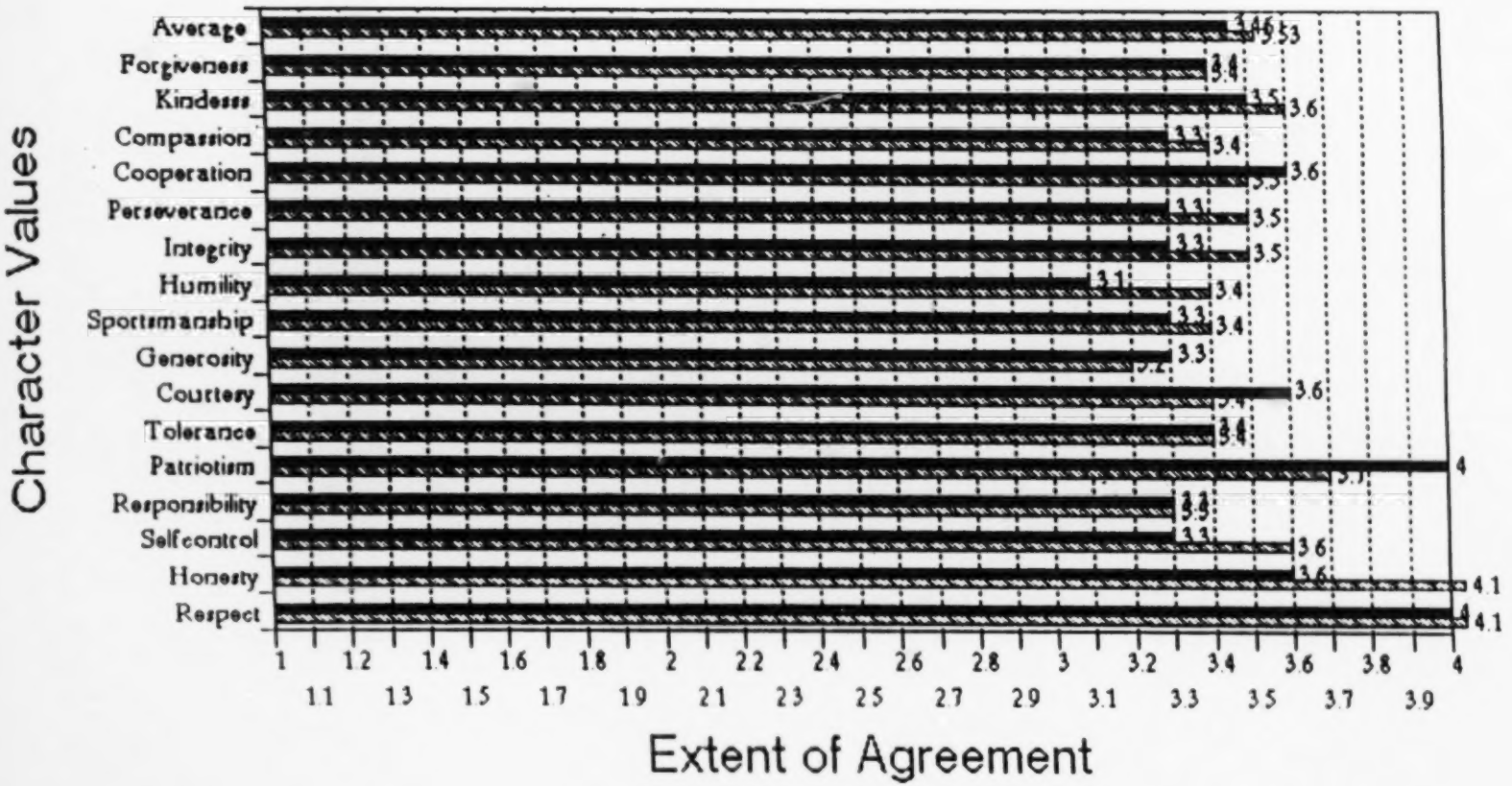
CARROLLTON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Teachers' and Students' Perceptions



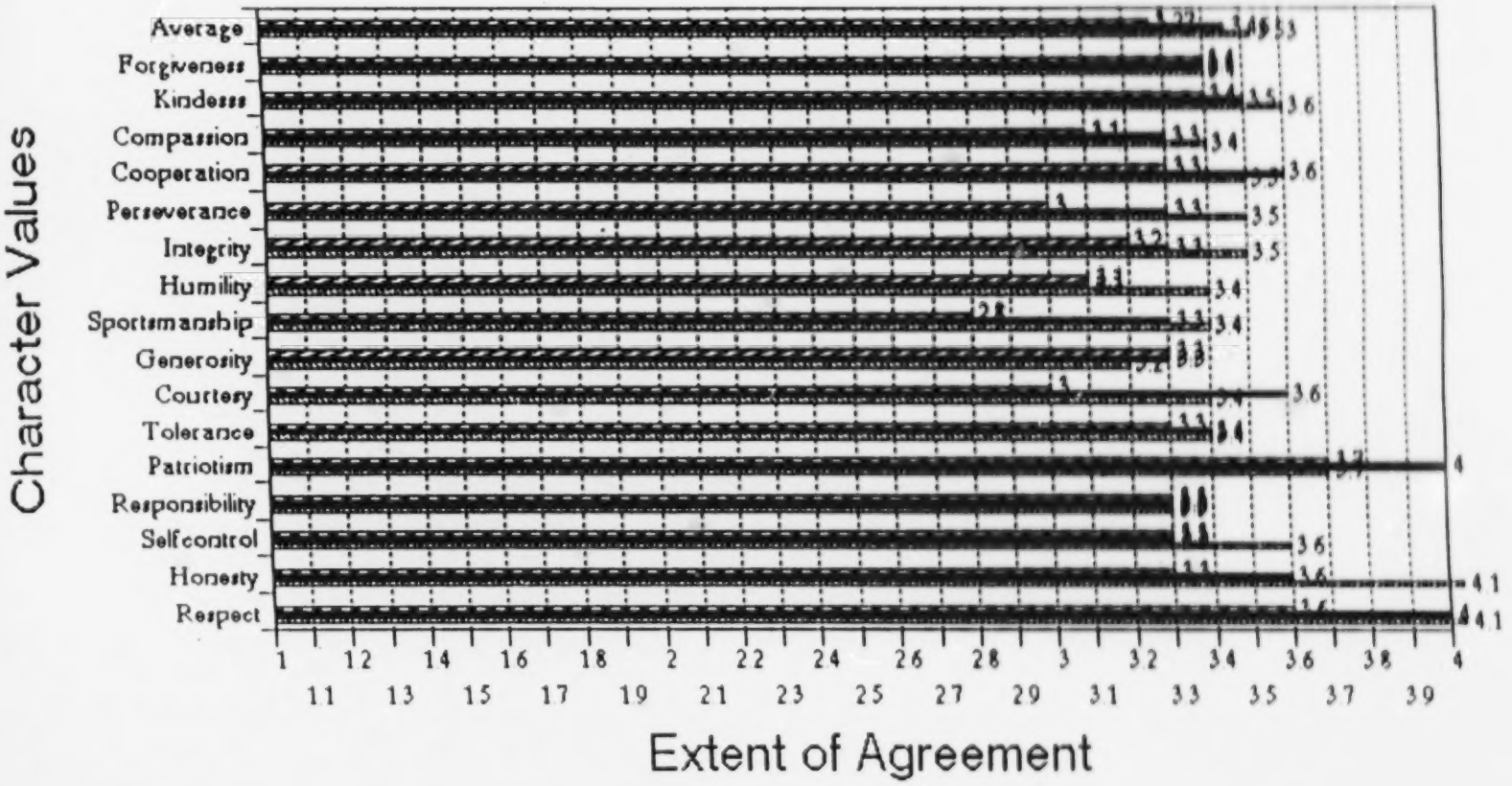
CARROLLTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Student Perceptions



CARROLLTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Student Perceptions



CARROLLTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Teachers' and Students' Perceptions